



LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
LOUISVILLE METRO BOARD OF HEALTH

GREG FISCHER
MAYOR

KAREN M. COST, Ph.D..
BOARD CHAIRPERSON

December 10, 2019

The last several decades have seen much progress in reducing smoking rates and consequently reducing diseases and deaths relating to smoking. However, the relatively recent appearance and use of e-cigarettes, especially in our younger citizens, is threatening this progress. In 2018 the United States Surgeon General declared the surge in youth vaping an epidemic. Recent data from the CDC reveal that 1 in 4 high school students use e-cigarettes and 10% of middle school students reported the use of e-cigarettes in the month before they were surveyed. The CDC is currently conducting an investigation into vaping-related illnesses because approximately 2300 people have become ill and 48 deaths have been reported.

The Louisville Metro Board of Health strongly supports efforts at the state level related to increased tobacco prevention and control, and join other business, health, and safety organizations in the state and the nation that support:

- Raising the legal age for purchasing tobacco products from 18 to 21;
- Adding a state excise tax of 27.5 percent on the sale of e-cigarettes and vaping products;
- Increasing funding for tobacco prevention and cessation; and
- Repealing preemption and restoring local control.

Raising the legal age for sales of tobacco products to buyers 21 and older is a promising strategy to help reduce youth tobacco use and improve adolescent health. More than 95% of adult smokers started before age 21, and most (81%) started before age 18. The developing teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and early exposure puts adolescents at a higher risk for depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder.

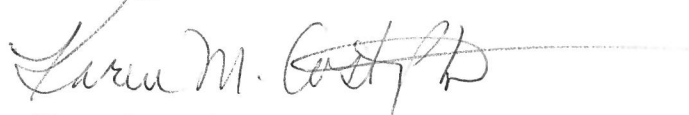
Excise taxes are a proven measure to reduce tobacco use, particularly among youth and pregnant women, and they were a big piece of the puzzle in reducing youth cigarette smoking rates nationwide and in Kentucky. We supported a 50-cent increase in the tobacco excise tax in 2018, the passage of which led 39% of Kentucky smokers to cut back. E-cigarettes are the only tobacco product sold in Kentucky that are not subject to such a tax, which makes them less expensive than traditional cigarettes and more attractive to teenagers.

Comprehensive state tobacco prevention and cessation programs that reduce youth and adult tobacco use are extremely cost effective. One study found that every dollar spent on comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation programs saved \$5 in reduced hospitalizations for heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, and cancer caused by tobacco use. As a recipient of these funds, we hold smoking cessation classes and conduct community-wide education.

State law currently preempts local governments from enacting stronger or different tobacco control policies than the Commonwealth's. Preemption is a tactic used by the tobacco industry to prevent strong and innovative tobacco control policies tailored to meet local needs. Until preemption is overturned, advocating for changes to state law is necessary to reduce vaping and the harms of tobacco use to Louisville teens.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Karen M. Cost", followed by a horizontal line.

Karen Cost, PhD

Chair

Louisville Board of Health